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ABSTRACT

A study was initiated to determine effective teaching strategies for the art education of low achieving students. A review of literature on academic drive yielded five mechanistic models that provided explanations for low-achievement drive. The key factors in these models were avoidance, time gradients, extraneous stimuli, prolonged deprivations, high activation, and directedness. Using research related to the avoidance model, a research design was planned around activities that made no reference to past performance, and emphasized short-range goals, little decision making, high interest levels, and freedom from competition and achievement standards. The treatment variables were the use of conventional versus unconventional art media. Students in the conventional media groups used clay, linoleum for printmaking, colored pastels, tempera paint, and wax crayons. The unconventional media were aluminum foil, styrofoam objects, cardboard tubes, wooden dowels, colored acetate sheets, and other materials not usually purchased for art class use. The research subjects were 40 males between the ages of 11 and 17 from three youth service institutions. Pretesting indicated that the subjects were matched in performance prior to the treatment. Posttest analysis showed that the unconventional media group had a significantly higher level of participation in artistic production, suggesting a relationship between chosen media and the motivation of specific populations of youth to engage in prescribed art activities. (PG)

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APPROPRIATE TEACHER STRATEGIES TO INCREASE THE PARTICIPATION OF LOW-ACHIEVING YOUTHS IN ART ACTIVITIES IN THE SCHOOLS

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SP 019 104

APPROPRIATE TEACHER STRATEGIES TO INCREASE THE PARTICIPATION OF LOW-ACHIEVING YOUTHS IN ART ACTIVITIES IN THE SCHOOLS.

Introduction

Background: For thirty thousand years, mankind has valued aesthetic visual experiences, either through direct activity in the production of forms or by sharing in the recorded images produced by others. It has been only in the twentieth century, however, that art educators have made explicit the need for and the values resulting from such experiences for all youths in the schools. The research here reported was motivated by a series of questions relating to the goal of involving all children in school art programs.

During the 1970's, much of the literature in art education has described values of art involvement for all children, including that written by Barkan, Chapman, and Kern (1970), Feldman (1970), Dimondstein (1974), the Arts, Education, and Americans Panel (1977), and McFee and Degge (1977). However, consideration must be given to the needs of populations of children with a variety of handicaps and low-achievement drive towards school work before involvement for all children is possible. Progress has been made by art therapists to meet needs of the "handicapped" under the leadership of people including Naumburg (1966) and Uhlin (1972). There has been no sizable parallel movement to study strategies to increase the participation of low-achievers in art activities. Such study was initiated by

SP 019 104

this research with success in identifying one strategic direction to be taken by art teachers.

Review of literature on achievement drive: The first phase of the research involved identifying explanations and recommendations that are presently unattainable, to any large extent, in reports written by art educators. Through searching the literature of psychology and education, five mechanistic models were identified that provided explanations for low-achievement drive. The key factors presented in these models were avoidance, time gradients, extraneous stimuli, prolonged deprivations, and activation and directedness.

Grasha (1976) described avoidance as a response to prevent recurrence of negative consequences associated with previous stimulus-response experiences. An organism associates a present stimulus with the negative consequences of responding to similar stimuli in the past and responds in a different way from the past to avoid the repetition of the negative consequences. The model suggests that low-achievement drive may be understood as a consequence of failure experiences when facing new stimuli that could be associated with previous failures. Others who have given similar explanations for low-achievement include Russell (1971) and Fine (1967).

As a second model for low-achievement drive, Hull (cited in Hilgard and Bower, 1966) established a mechanism of time gradients through research which demonstrated that attraction to goals was dependent on the difficulties relating to barriers and

distance from the goals. In his work using animals in maze studies, Hull found that the more time it took to reach goals because of barriers and distance or the more indirect the route to the goals, the more hesitant was the response toward the goals. Hull's model was a reaction against the difficulties relating to achieving goals or a reaction of confusion if goal directions were deceptive, without any necessity to refer to past experiences as was the case with the model of avoidance.

Wyrwicka (1972) described two mechanistic models. The first of her models was of extraneous stimuli, as one explanation for inhibitory behavior, in which conflicting interactions between stimuli inhibit response. In her model, if a stimulus is introduced that requires a specific response and another stimulus is present that is stronger in attraction than the one introduced, the stronger stimulus may compete in a way to retard the required response. In its simplest form, the extraneous stimulus model could apply to conflicting interactions between two on-going stimuli. In its more subtle forms, the model could apply to the less obvious, but ever present, influences that negatively affect children's self-concepts or negatively affect their views about the importance of educational involvements.

In the literature of education and psychology, much has been written describing the influences competing with educational goals and offering recommendations for counteracting the negative effects of the influences. Among the authors of such writing are

Pantini and Weinstein (1968), Banks (1972), Mouly (1973), Massey, Scott, and Dornbusch (1975), and Bourne and Ekstrand (1976).

Prolonged sensory deprivation was a second mechanism presented by Wyrwicka (1972). While in her extraneous stimuli model a second stimulus is present that conflicts with an introduced first stimulus, in her second mechanism, the absence of sensory stimuli prevents giving attention to the introduced stimulus. The competitive factor is not an interacting stimulus; rather, it is the lack of sensory stimuli required for the well-being of a given person that inhibits the response to an introduced stimulus. Applied to school achievement situations, Wyrwicka's model would account for any low-achievement drive among children who live under conditions where there is a prolonged lack of sensory stimuli. Coles (1971) addressed the issue of sensory deprivations among children from poverty stricken Appalachian regions, and Hunt (1971) identified similar issues regarding some Black populations. Others who wrote of such problems among specific populations include Landy, Rosenberg, and Sutton-Smith (1972), Frostig and Maslow (1973), and Tolbert (1972).

For the fifth mechanistic explanation, in their studies of activation and directedness, Stephens and Evans (1973) found that the best performance in educational involvements depends on moderation in learning atmospheric conditions. They found that there is a direct correlation between high activation in the classroom and high anxiety within children. Because of the

anxiety associated with it, high activation negatively affects the ability of children to respond to tasks relating to achievement. The authors found that low activation caused drowsiness which also negatively affects learning. In addition, they observed that directedness levels, if inappropriate, had equally negative effects.

Avoidance as the focus for study: Although all of the mechanistic explanations have a bearing on low-achievement drive among children, avoidance was chosen as a focus for study because it most directly addressed causes for low achievement in terms of negative self-perception about abilities based on consequences of past experiences which could be interpreted to have direct implications regarding appropriate teacher strategies to affect low achievement in art education.

Procedures for the collection of data: Recommendations to increase drive behavior related to the avoidance model were offered by writers including Russell (1971), Fine (1967), Holt (1964), French (1965), Birney, Burdick, and Teevan (1969), Torrance (1970), and Travers (1977). Through interpreting these recommendations, the research design was planned around a focus on activities emphasizing no reference to past performance, short range goals, little planning and few decisions necessary, high interest level and open ended response, and freedom from competition and achievement standards. With the plan of activities, procedures were planned to include privately individualized or group working arrangements. Evaluation of

activities emphasized positive reinforcement for goal-directed responding with the importance of activity outcomes being minimized. Art session plans were developed according to the recommendations with treatment variables being: the use of media commonly associated with school art programs as "conventional" media compared with the use of "unconventional" media, and procedures with subjects working individually compared with subjects working in small groups.

Method

A two media by two groupings pre-test, post-test design was employed through the use of four sets of treatment plans. Each set of plans contained three baseline sessions, to establish patterns of participatory behavior, and four treatment sessions that were varied from the other sets in media proposed for artistic production, either conventional or unconventional, and in individual or group working arrangements.

All baseline sessions and treatment sessions were centered around themes that were the same for all groups. The themes included "still life drawing," "landscape drawing," "painting feelings to music," "sculptures for space stations," "printing entertainment centers," "disco lights," and "rock and sand weather predictors." Because the final theme was not satisfactory for those subjects using conventional materials, the final theme for the conventional groups was changed to "mural designing." Conventional media including wax crayons, pencils, water colors, and tempera paint were used by all

subjects during the baseline sessions. During the treatment sessions, those subjects in the conventional media groups used clay, linoleum for printmaking, colored pastels, tempera paint, and wax crayons. The subjects in the unconventional groups used aluminum foil, styrofoam objects, cardboard tubes, dowel rods, colored acetate sheets, sand colored with powdered tempera, gravel, scrap wooden objects, and other materials not ordinarily purchased for school art class use.

Forty male subjects, aged between eleven and seventeen years, from three youth service institutions in north-eastern Ohio, were used as the study population. The sites were chosen on the basis that the populations had a high percentage of backgrounds of low achievement in school performance.

The study employed twelve research assistants who either taught from the treatment plans or recorded subject responses (or both but in different groups).

Results

Two 2 X 2 factorial analyses of variance provided statistical information for interpreting the data collected on the responses of the subjects. The baseline, or pre-test, analysis indicated that the groups of subjects were matched in performance prior to exposure to treatments. The post-test analysis indicated that the use of unconventional media, as a treatment, resulted in a higher level of participation, significant at the .01 level, in artistic production than did the other treatments.

Discussion

The findings suggested a relationship between chosen media and the motivation of specific populations of youths to engage in prescribed art activities. There is need for added study of the motivational significance of media for children at different age levels and with varying degrees of achievement drive toward school work. There is also further need to study working procedural arrangements for children while engaging in artistic production. There is need for research related to mechanistic explanations other than the avoidance model in order for art educators to develop a full range of strategies for increasing interest levels of diversified school populations. There is finally a need to establish the significance of the research as it applies to the participation of low achievers in other subject areas of school work. The mechanistic models and associated recommendations provide the framework for such needed educational research.

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